

Title: Piloting a National Online Tutorial in Slavic Information Literacy: The LOTSE-Slavic Studies Project at Bochum University Library, Germany

Abstract: This article describes the Library Online Tour and Self-Paced Education [LOTSE] project for Slavic Studies [LOTSE-Slavistik] at Bochum Library at Ruhr University Bochum in Germany. LOTSE-Slavistik is an open-access online-tutorial that provides German-speaking students and researchers with an introduction to the most important resources in Slavic languages, literatures, and cultures. The tutorial was developed by Bochum University Library in cooperation with the Slavic Department / Lotman Institute at Ruhr University Bochum. This resource-oriented tutorial constitutes one module within a larger Slavistics portal, which is itself under the umbrella of the online German national clearing house of subject portals, *Vascoda*. This pedagogically-designed module is intended primarily for students and can be used either as a stand alone e-learning tool or as an element of an integrated Slavic information literacy course. This article sets the broader historical and institutional context for the project, describes the content and layout of the LOTSE tutorial, and summarizes how it has been used in a recent undergraduate course on Slavic information literacy.

Keywords: Slavic studies; online tutorials; information literacy; Library Online Tour and Self-Paced Education (LOTSE)

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1 Institutional Background

Ruhr University Bochum was founded in 1965. It is a large West German university (33.000 students, 4.500 faculty and staff) with a strong Slavic Department (500 students), and a History Department with a PhD-program in Eastern European History (50 graduate students). The University is also the institutional home of the Iurii Lotman Institute for Russian Culture.³ This research institute was founded in 1989 under the leadership of Karl Eimermacher, and quickly became a major sponsor of German-Russian joint research projects. The Slavic Department / Lotman Institute of Russian Culture and the Chair of Eastern European History continue to have strong ties and participate in cooperative ventures with partner institutions of higher education in Eastern Europe and Russia. The most prominent example is the College of European Cultures (Vysshaya shkola evropeiskikh kul'tur VShEK) in Moscow, which is run cooperatively by Ruhr University Bochum and the Russian State University for the Humanities (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennii Gumanitarnii Universitet RGGU).

In 2002, the Lotman Institute and the Slavic Department began to offer Bachelor's and Master's programs in Slavic and Russian languages, literatures, and cultures. Master's students have the option of pursuing a Master's degree in Education with a focus on Russian language teaching. Various seminars are also offered through the Lotman Institute. Recently, the Slavic Department and Lotman Institute established an interdisciplinary BA/MA-degree program in Russian Culture. Its curriculum includes options for distance/e-learning courses and blended learning as well as in-country travel and study opportunities. Thus far, information literacy instruction has been available as an option, but has not been fully integrated into the curriculum.

During the past few years, Bochum University Library has begun collaborating with the Slavic Department to offer information literacy classes at both basic and advanced research levels. In the process, the library has developed a concept for teaching subject-specific information literacy⁴. The library has two electronic classrooms (WLAN, projector, laptops, and an electronic whiteboard) dedicated to information literacy instruction and hosts classes nearly every day, often utilizing both classrooms simultaneously. Instructors of introductory courses regularly bring in their classes to learn how to search for subject-specific information in their particular field of research. These library sessions are co-taught by library teams that always include a library subject specialist and reference/ information specialist (Erda Lapp is the Library's Slavic specialist). The library regularly recommends top databases in each subject area and, in many cases, has created search tips and audiovisual explanations on how to search (screenrecordings / screencasts). Finally, the library organizes subject-specific "road-shows" during which librarians take a laptop, projector and promotional materials out to where their users actually are (in Bochum this is generally the cafeteria in the given department's building) and demonstrate two or three of the top databases in their fields. By providing these instructional and outreach services, the library has steadily worked toward making information literacy a core competence on campus.

2 The LOTSE-Slavistik Online Tutorial

As its name suggests, LOTSE (the German word for pilot, guide, or instructor) is both an e-resource and an online-tutorial in information literacy, here defined as the ability to systematically and fluently search, retrieve, analyze, select, evaluate and process relevant information.

The greater LOTSE system was designed on a decentralized and cooperative model according to which several independent German university libraries provide content in different specialized fields of study⁵. For the last 5 years, Bochum University Library has been responsible for adding content to the LOTSE system in electrical engineering and geography.

In 2006, Bochum University Library received a grant from the German Research Association (DFG) to develop an online Slavic information literacy module for the LOTSE system. This module would constitute one module within the larger Slavistics portal,⁶ “Slavistikportal,” which is itself under the umbrella of the online German national clearing house of subject portals, *Vascoda*.⁷

Bochum University Library was chosen for this project because of the library’s experience with the LOTSE system, its experience as a teaching library and because of its success in integrating subject specific information literacy into curricula. The Slavic Department agreed to support the LOTSE Slavistik project in all ways possible and recommended doctoral candidate Miriam Platte as project manager. By 2007, work on LOTSE-Slavistik had been completed, and the new e-resource / tutorial first went live.

Within each subject or disciplinary module⁸ the LOTSE system looks a lot like a subway map (e.g. of Berlin or Moscow) with seven subway lines radiating from a central stop, the names for each of the lines are: [See Figure I].

- Searching for literature (*Literatur suchen*)
- Finding literature (*Literatur beschaffen*)
- Searching for facts (*Fakten suchen*)
- Learning and researching (*Lernen und Forschen*)
- Using the library (*Bibliothek benutzen*)

- Getting and staying in contact (*Kontakte finden und pflegen*)
- Staying fully-informed (*Auf dem Laufenden bleiben*)

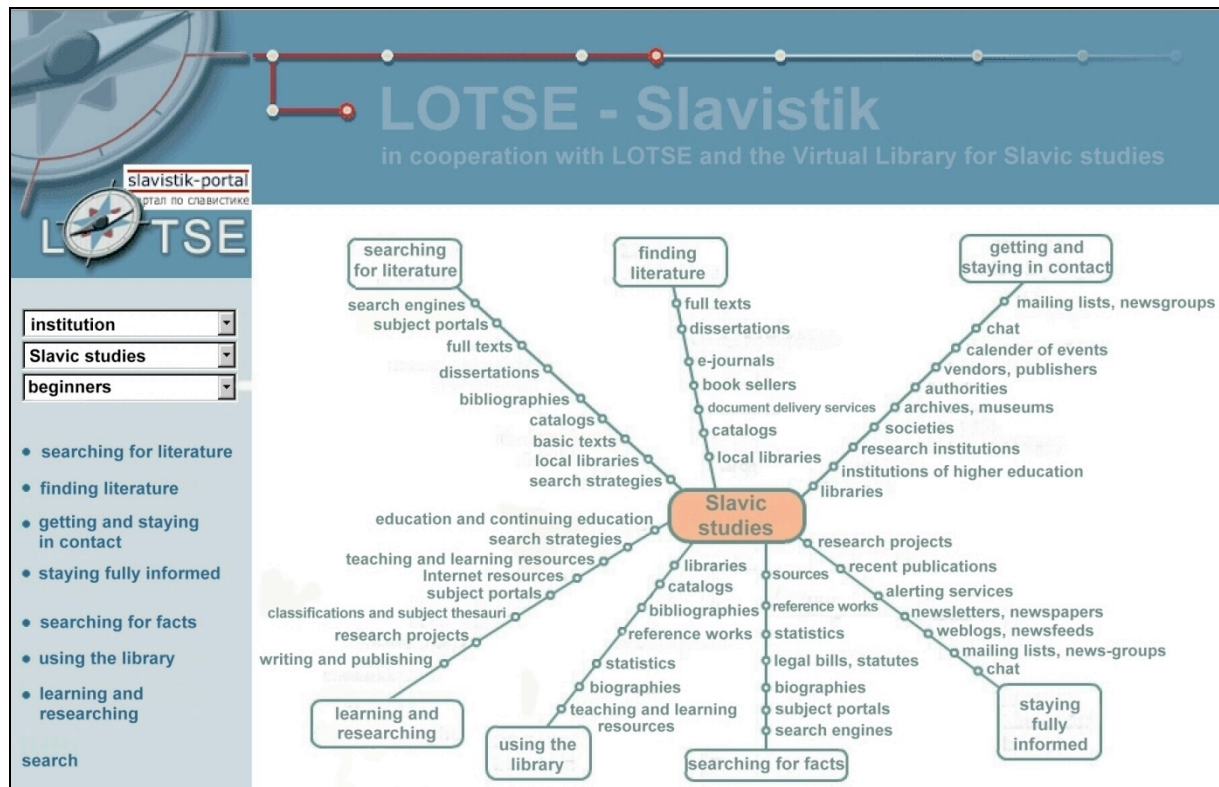


Figure I⁹ Top level of the LOTSE system

Each of the stationstops on a particular subway line (e.g. Searching for literature) refers to a specific category of essential resources, tools or strategies in the field of Slavic Studies (e.g. full text resources, search strategies, writing and publishing, etc.). Some stationstops appear on several lines, as they make sense in more than one context - for example, catalogs or subject portals. Clicking on the name of any one of these general “station stop” categories further subdivides them into a more specific listing (e.g. library catalogs of different East European countries or search engines grouped by distinct Slavic languages). See Figure II.

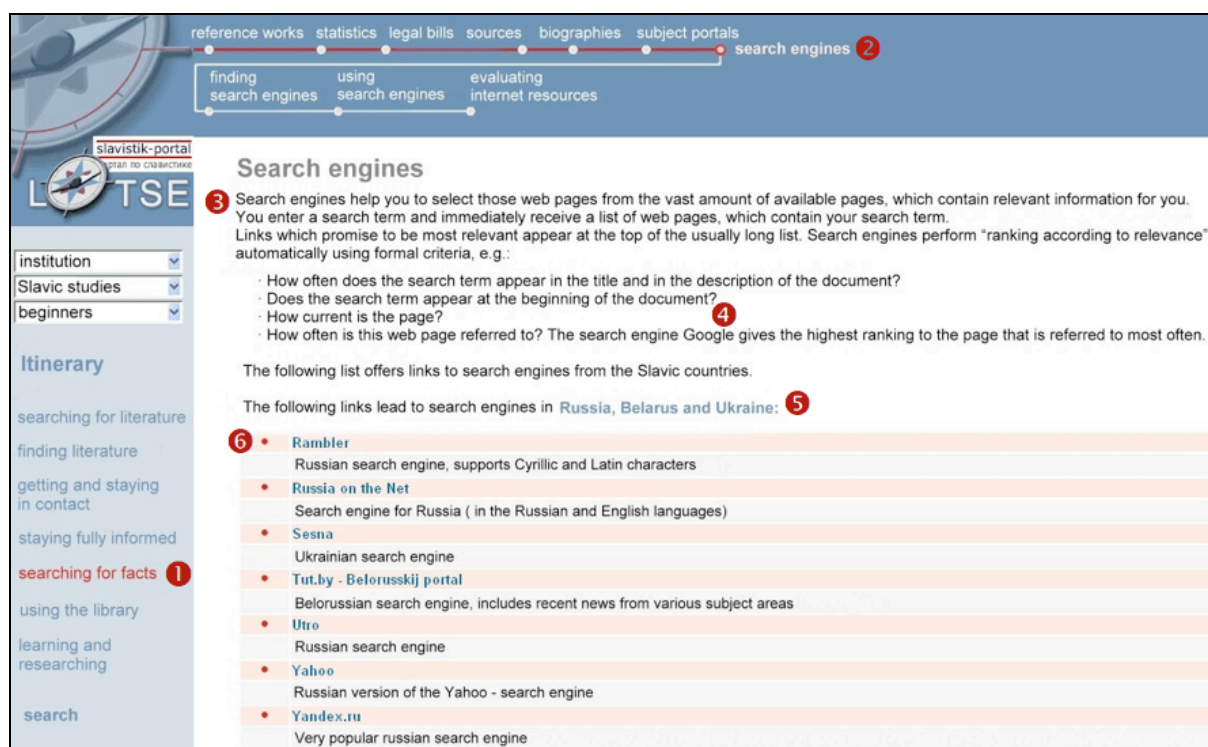


Figure II Second level of the LOTSE system

Each number identifies a different element within the organizational structure:

- 1 → The name of the selected subway line is highlighted on the left side navigation bar, in this case, “Searching for facts”
2. → The names of all stops on the line relative to the given stop are provided at the top of the screen. In this case, the selected stop is “search engines”.
3. → In the “beginner’s mode” of LOTSE, explanatory textual information for each topic is offered directly under the name of that station stop. In the expert mode, this text is masked in order to reduce unnecessary clutter on the page.
4. → This is an example of a general / non-subject-specific link.
5. → Next are subject-specific links. In this case, the search engines in the various Slavic languages are grouped into the linguistic categories of East, West and South Slavic.
6. → Each subject-specific link is titled in blue (with hyperlink) and provides a short annotation .

The LOTSE system allows users to browse through stations on any line on the map or, alternatively, to go directly to specific information resources (e.g. on research projects). The system includes over 700 links to high quality web pages and other lists of links, which can also be found by doing a keyword search within LOTSE using the Search button (*Suche*)¹⁰. These links provide a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of the most important resources in the field of Slavic studies¹¹, offering students a rich source base and researchers an efficient way to stay fully-informed about the latest projects or databases in the field. And since LOTSE was developed within the framework of a national Slavic portal, where a high emphasis was placed on linking to free, open access content, most of the resources available through LOTSE-Slavistik are accessible both nationally and internationally.

The LOTSE system also allows for a Bochum-specific perspective, providing access to materials that are available only through Bochum University Library. However, because the current version of LOTSE allows access to licensed resources only via the library's website, access to those materials through LOTSE is rather cumbersome. In the new version of LOTSE, currently under development, access to licensed databases (for those with institutional authorization) will be possible directly through the system.

3 Using “LOTSE-Slavistik” to teach Slavic information literacy

When the “LOTSE-Slavistik” module became available online in 2007, the Bochum Slavic Department decided to begin using it immediately. During the 2007/2008 winter semester, Miriam Platte incorporated its use into the syllabus of a 3-credit, semester-long undergraduate course on Slavic information literacy. She also sought her students' feedback as to the utility of the LOTSE system and of LOTSE-Slavistik in particular to their research and learning.

Erda Lapp, the library's Slavic studies specialist, agreed to support the course by contributing a session on searching catalogs as well as one on bibliographic databases. The course that Miriam Platte developed (and continues to teach) is called "Searching and Accessing Slavic Studies Information." Academic advisors at Ruhr University Bochum recommend taking the course at the beginning of the BA program, since research and information literacy skills are required throughout the three-year BA program and beyond. And while the initial target group for the course was composed of undergraduate students in their freshmen year, undoubtedly seniors and graduate students may also find the course quite useful.

Miriam Platte's course puts a heavy emphasis on hands-on approaches. This is supported by the fact that each student is provided a laptop with which to test the approaches and strategies learned in class in real time. Besides being heavily hands on, the course assignments are also structured to develop a number of key competencies or literacies: in addition to weekly homework assignments, students must give a public presentation of their search strategy and also turn in a PowerPoint version of the search strategy they have developed. This insures they develop some competency in public speaking/ presentation, as well as the ability to work successfully with presentation software. This course also represents a truly collaborative effort between the Slavic faculty and librarians, who have joined forces to co-teach a course that introduces students to the fundamentals of how to plan and perform a search, acquire specific knowledge about Slavic information sources, and use on-line sources critically.

The underlying pedagogical approach or principle used to pull the course together was adapted from the work of Carol C. Kuhlthau's "Seeking meaning: a process approach to library resources and services"¹². Following Kuhlthau's process approach, the course was structured around the phases of (1) task initiation, (2) topic selection, (3) pre-focus

exploration, (4) focus formulation, (5) information collection, and (6) conclusion of the search.

(1) Task initiation

This phase prepares the students for making a topic selection. The students contemplate the assignment, relate any prior experience to it, and consider possible topics. The students are introduced to various mindmapping and brainstorming techniques and are encouraged to openly discuss their ideas. Because the LOTSE system does not currently support the use of mindmapping techniques, these activities were not fully integrated into the use of LOTSE-Slavistik. However, the LOTSE system does offer several guides for term paper and search planning, which were utilized in the course. We do plan on recommending the integration of mindmapping software into the next version of the LOTSE system, and expect to discuss this recommendation with the LOTSE contributors in other disciplinary areas soon.

(2) Topic selection

The task in this phase is for the students to settle on a research topic. The students weigh topics against personal interest, project requirements, information available, and time allotted and then choose a topic that best fits their criteria. As a part of this phase, they consult with information specialists, do a preliminary search of the library catalog and consult general sources to provide context and a good overview of the topic. The instructors also introduce the students to the basic library and search vocabulary and definitions necessary for academic research (e.g. bibliography/ catalog/ database; keyword/ descriptor, etc.). These terms are also addressed in LOTSE-Slavistik.

(3) Pre-focus exploration

The task here is investigative; to explore the width and depth of the topic before settling on a specific focus. In this phase the students use sources suggested by LOTSE to explore their topic and collect factual information about it (e.g. definitions, biographical facts, etc.). We have found that without prior searching experience some students tend to choose a very broad topic (e.g. “Soviet Science”, or “The Novel Anna Karenina”) and need to learn how to limit their searches more precisely. At this time, they are introduced to Boolean operators, which are also covered in great detail in LOTSE, and learn how to apply them to their searches in the various catalogs or databases suggested by LOTSE. Another desired outcome of this phase is the ability to critically evaluate websites and other information sources found online. LOTSE also provides suggestions and resources to aid users in acquiring this key information literacy skill.

(4) Focus exploration

This phase concentrates on the students’ ability to formulate a focus from the information they have uncovered up to this point. It is at this point that the students are first introduced to the licensed, bibliographic and full-text databases to which the library subscribes. As part of their work, they create a short list of possible focuses within their topic area. After considering the relative merits of each and the available supporting resources, they then either select a single focus, or combine several themes into a thesis statement.

(5) Information collection

The task here is to gather information that defines, extends and supports the thesis statement. At this stage the students have already been introduced to a broad spectrum of resources and are able to perform fairly comprehensive searches in catalogs, licensed databases and various other web resources. They now know how and when to request research assistance. Quite logically it is at this time that students also learn how to locate the materials once they have found relevant sources and to cite sources. They also learn how to use citation management software such as Endnote or Citavi. LOTSE provides descriptions and comparisons of the

available citation management programs, which help the students to make an informed decision as to which system to use. Students have enthusiastically taken to using citation management software and admit to having lost the citations to scores of titles before they began using these kinds of programs.

(6) Search conclusion

This last phase concludes the search for information. Here the students identify their need for any additional information and verify any data from questionable sources using authoritative, licensed or peer-reviewed sources.. It is also at this point that they begin to understand that searching is truly an iterative process. To support this, they are introduced to a “station stop” in the LOTSE system that deals with how to stay fully-informed on a topic even after the search is completed and the presentation is over (e.g. through newsletters, alerting services, weblogs, newsfeeds, mailing lists, news groups, etc.).

The students presentation portion of the course, with which it formally ends, is intended to demonstrate that the students can apply the learning that has taken place during the course: they are able to appropriately utilize various information sources, to select and evaluate relevant titles, and to broaden or limit a search as necessary. In the final session the students evaluate the course and their learning experience.

4 Conclusion and outlook

The initial response to the course taught in 2007 and 2008 was overwhelmingly positive. The course attracted Slavic Studies students, Russian Culture students and even Science majors. In their evaluations, a majority of students reported finding the LOTSE Slavic tutorial a tool that gives an excellent overview of the available resources and allows them to explore materials at their own pace. They felt that LOTSE supported all steps in the process of collecting material for their paper. Several students said that among electronic and printed resources in the

LOTSE system, they found the resources that introduce them to the topography of the field especially valuable (the materials on the line “getting and staying in contact”). However, some students did feel overwhelmed by the mass of information contained in LOTSE. They also mentioned that navigating the system was difficult due to the multiple layers of information.

As mentioned before, the LOTSE Slavistik project has recently been granted a second phase of funding. Our goal now is the development of a marketing strategy for the tutorial. We believe that the information literacy course we are teaching is one of the best ways to market LOTSE Slavistik on the Bochum campus. It has also been demonstrated to students and faculty in Berlin, Munich and Leipzig. The audiences have been impressed by the wealth of information in LOTSE. In order to gather additional feedback toward improving the system, we have put up a survey on the Bochum University Library website and have asked all the Slavic departments in the country to visit LOTSE-Slavistik and send us any feedback they may have about its usefulness, user-friendliness or about the quality of information provided¹³. Most of the feedback we have received thus far implies that users see enormous potential in the LOTSE-Slavistik tutorial, and they express the hope that it will remain current and updated. They especially like the fact that LOTSE Slavistik is not only focused on Russia or Russian-oriented sources, but contains information in all of the Slavic languages and on all Slavic cultures. They also appreciate that the system offers support for all levels of study (from undergraduates to faculty) and at all stages of the research process.

LOTSE is a complex system for serious learners. It is not entertainment and will not market itself. As such, it is clear that we will have to continue to bring LOTSE to our users’ attention and assist them when they begin using it. However, we are committed to keeping the standards high. We are providing users a powerful tool, and one that covers multiple

disciplines in one place and using a common technological infrastructure and organizational system. A great deal of work has been put into developing the architecture of the modules, as well as compiling and updating the resources, annotations and the explanations. And in many ways, our work is really only beginning. The human and financial resources required to evaluate and update the LOTSE system, revise and enhance the disciplinary modules and market their use are in no way trivial. The librarians at Bochum University Library and the greater German library community have decided that this is a task worth shouldering.

³ <<http://lotman.rub.de>>

⁴ <<http://www.ub.rub.de/Informationen/Informationsveranstaltungen.html>>

⁵ <<http://lotse.uni-muenster.de>>

⁶ <<http://www.slavistik-portal.de>>

⁷ <<http://www.vascoda.de>>

⁸ Currently, the following subject areas are available in LOTSE: Business/Economics, Education, Electrical Engineering, Ethnology, Geography, History, Interdisciplinary, Medicine, Netherlands Studies, Philosophy, Physics, Psychology, Slavic Studies, Social Sciences.

⁹ For the purposes of this article, this screen has been translated into English. The navigation and explanatory materials on the original site are entirely in German.

¹⁰ The Search button performs a search in the titles or full texts within all LOTSE modules or one specific LOTSE module.

¹¹ Currently the system is up-to-date. It will take a common effort to keep it updated.

¹² Carol Collier Kuhlthau, *Seeking meaning: a process approach to library and information services*. 2nd ed. (Westport, CT, London: Libraries Unlimited, 2004).

Carol Kuhlthau's work was brought to the attention of the Bochum librarians by colleagues from Seton Hall University Libraries with whom Bochum University Library has been cooperating since 2003.

¹³ The online survey is still in process. There is no assessment mechanism built into LOTSE. Since LOTSE is integrated into the national Slavistics portal, it is visible.